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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the correlation between attendance and grade point average among high school juniors, hypothesizing that there would not be a significant correlation between the two. The sample consisted of 32 students randomly selected from among 172 high school students enrolled in a Chicago public school during school years 1995-1996 and 1994-1995. The study involved a pretest-posttest design using school records of attendance and grade point averages for target years. Data analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between days present and grade point average in the first year of the study and a moderate positive correlation between the two in the second year of the study. The results show that attendance may have a sizable impact on grade point average. The findings are in relative concurrence with related literature. The paper makes recommendations based on the study results. (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

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ED 423 224

ATTENDANCE AND GRADE POINT AVERAGE: A STUDY

VINNIE P. STRICKLAND

One of the greatest concerns of public high school districts is that of high student absence rates and related effects. Absenteeism affects a range of concomitant elements from the budget to truancy and crime to daily lunchroom planning. Absenteeism is believed to have a significant affect on grade achievement. While a few experts have assessed little or no relationship between a student's grades and his absenteeism during a given period; many others have postulated that a consistently absent student is not attaining information needed to achieve.

Related studies of absence on grade achievement of public high school students indicate largely strong negative correlations between absences and grades. The strongest correlations are among lower grade level students (Heberling and Shaffer 1995), (Yunker 1967), and (Winkler, et al. 1993) and second-year high school students (Claus, et al. 1994). These grade levels are the interest of much related analysis. The desire to increase achievement such as grades, test scores, and grade point averages has caused school superintendents to invest in motivators, experts, and technology to abate intense absenteeism. This investment has caused major involvement in attendance offices and at planning and budgeting tables. The impact of absences on grades may seem to be significant. This impact is sometimes understated by such effects as make-up class work, remediation, and counseling.

This syndrome of absenteeism yet haunts administrators. The delinquent and reckless overtones usually attached to this act paint a mental picture of poor classroom performance. Poor performance on standardized tests and other measures of school effectiveness have caused concerns about deficits that may be partially attributable to high absence rates. The picture of an administrator attempting to factor in high projected absence rates to attain a desired vision for excellence looks inappropriately dim, and the vision may be intrinsically flawed.

A look at the effect of high absenteeism on grade achievement may facilitate some offsetting remedies for the short-term. More base knowledge could provide at least marginal reference over a longer period as society changes and evolves. If excessive absence in the study of English is more than that in math, for example; provisions can be made for restructuring some English classes or for creatively tailored forms of tutoring.

Due to widespread excessive absence, failing marks for school effectiveness, and seemingly "esteemed" attitudes about failing grades on the part of some youngsters, a professional and moral concern on the part of educators and administrators plead for workable answers. Additional research may find predictable relationships between absence and grade achievement. Significant gains in school effectiveness may be in reasonable reach as a result, and good expectations could replace current

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norms.

The related literature largely over the past ten to fifteen years suggests that chronic absenteeism among public high school students is a major indicator of grade achievement. Absenteeism may also be a significant deterrent to measures of school effectiveness. Experts and technology alike have sought to empower school administrators with tools and methods to bring school attendance rates into compliance with state boards of education requirements. These advisors, consultants, and suppliers to the systematic problem of absenteeism have served an aim to quickly identify students who are consistently absent. Linking this purpose to what may be gained from studies of the correlations of chronic absenteeism and grade achievement may encourage collective and multiple professional endeavors to seek manageable ways to maintain relative effectiveness.

Absenteeism is defined as periods of not being in attendance. Both attendance and absenteeism are operationally defined in standard tests and instruments that measure school effectiveness. These measurements are known to school administrators and are a part of school records. These results are comprised in school reports and archives. The overall indication is that there may be a connection between absenteeism and grade achievement. Grade point average is defined in school administration literature as the overall averaged subject-matter grade point.

There seems to be a respective division regarding the effect of absenteeism on grade achievement. Some researchers present data that show that high absence rates are either positively or negatively correlated with grade achievement. Others present data that seem to show that attenuating other factors are also linked and combined with absence rates and grade achievement. These factors either heighten or neutralize the impact of absenteeism on grades. Perfect attendance alone does not produce the highest grade point average; absence beyond limits is not expected to be the sole indicator of a change in grade point average. Kilhane (1971) presented a paper theorizing that the quality and quantity of counselor talk appears to have a greater impact on attendance change than on grade point average. This finding may suggest that any impact on grade point average included a shared impact due to counselor talk. Ray-Overstreet and Devane (1995) report combined improvement in attendance, grades, self-concept, discipline, and drop-out rates through integrated learning methods designed for at-risk students.

The available literature presents moderate base knowledge on the relationship between school absenteeism and grade achievement at the high school level. An examination of these variables at elementary grade levels may provide relative observations. Reflective studies of freshmen and sophomores in college concerning absence and achievement may have a predictive value for long-term effects. Findings of all available studies may point a direction for further research on absence and grade achievement at the secondary level. Recognizing the need to compare school grades with conduct, Lietz (1976) designed a longitudinal study of twenty-five K-6 classroom teachers. The data tracked students absence rates and conduct for two consecutive years against high and low grading teachers. Low grading teachers were significantly more successful than high grading teachers in improving attendance. As absence, an avoidance behavior, was less rewarding than acting out, perhaps chronically absent students sought approval and attention from teachers in improving their attendance. The longer term effect could be grade improvement.

Heberling and Shaffer (1995) examined the effects of school attendance on the grade point averages of seventy regular education and seventeen learning disabled fifth graders in a rural school district. School attendance had á significant positive influence on all of the students grade point averages. The findings suggest that absenteeism directly impacts the amount of learning at the elementary school level. No significant difference was determined in the absence rates of learning disabled students and regular education students. While these findings are not directly transferable to high school students, similarities as well as differences in the relative populations may help to refine assessments in high school populations.

Eighth grade students are close to freshmen high school students in terms of age and development. Many are also apathetic concerning grades and attendance. Yunker (1967) saw a need to determine the impact of small group guidance sessions and industrial tours on an experimental group of eighth grade males lacking interest and/or ability. Data were collected on grade point averages, attendance records, and a standard measure of performance. The experiment did not change students materially. Unexcused absences were not appreciably lowered. However, positive results were achieved on the mechanical and scientific scales of posttest measures of performance. There was a slight, though insignificant correlation with attendance and achievement on the test results. The impact on grades and grade point averages was not measurably significant.

Studies of collective attendance and achievement of early college years are not binding on predictive value of high school attendance and grades. The studies may provide a reflective look at high school attendance on grades and accomplishment as well as long-term achievement tendencies compared with attendance profiles of high school students.

Huff and Opacinch (1972) prepared a report on the study of attendance for the Catonsville Community College Senate. No attempt was made to establish a cause-effect relationship. Analyses were based on a sample of individual grades, and percentages of attendance were reported by the faculty. Grades were analyzed for 5,525 freshmen and 3,797 sophomores, totaling 56% of total grades. The data showed a strong relationship between attendance and grades awarded for the population as a whole and within each group. The degree of the relationship was strongest for students completing 0-10 credits. Mean grade point averages for each of the other groups rise as the degree of the relationship lessens. Thirty-eight percent of all "F" grades in the sample occurred within absence levels that could be tolerated. Blanchard, et al. (1990) studied how minority high school graduates from Seattle Public Schools moved into and through higher education at Washington Colleges and Universities. The study compared minority and white students from same districts. Findings were based on 1,331 minority students and a random sample of 400 whites graduating in 1983. The study strongly favored a strong relationship between grade point averages and baccalaureate degree among minorities.

Ackerman and Byock (1989) found that higher attendance at lectures and discussion groups related to higher grade point averages among students in the Freshman Summer Program and the Transfer Summer Program designed to remediate underprepared students at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Assuming that attendance is an indicator of grades awarded in early years of college as examined in the Huff and Opacinch and the Ackerman and Byock studies, it may follow that the findings of Blanchard and others may also be implicated by attendance of the target college students. Attendance behaviors in school starts early in a student's life. Similar to most behaviors at high school level, attendance and grade progress are influenced by peers, parental guidance and family structure, and community expectations. Chronic absence in high school may lead to an impact in the short-term as well as set an undesirable trend that may curtail optimal performance.

Marion (1985) presented data from a national longitudinal study of high school and college students that revealed a consistent relationship between positive self image in high school with attendance and grade point averages at postsecondary educational institutions. Curiel, et al. (1987) found smaller differences in grade point average and absenteeism and fewer dropouts and retentions among bilingual program participants starting in elementary schools. These findings may suggest a changing curriculum matching societal changes and a response to alternate learning methods.

Winkler, et al. (1993) presented a paper at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. This conference paper focused on student working status and performance. The effects of working and attending high school concurrently on the achievement of students were outweighed by absences and the affects of absence on achievement Subjects were 130 juniors and 110 seniors. Grade point averages and number of absences were gathered. Many students were employed, with most averaging twenty hours work during a seven-day period. For juniors, there was a relationship between number of hours worked and grade point average. For seniors, the number of absences - not hours worked was the variable associated with grade point average. The belief that the more hours worked, the lower the grade point average was not supported. Absence was seen to be the dominating factor on grade point average.

As part of the baseline studies needed for a new strategic plan for the Saginaw, Michigan high school district, the relationship of grade point averages, student absences, and

Michigan Educational Assessment Program results were studied relative to the amount of shared variation common to each. A June 1993 evaluation report covering years 1992-1993 presents data showing a study of all possible correlations of tenth grade first semester information for each of the district's two schools. Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were reviewed. Grade point average vs absence correlations were the strongest set. Grade point average vs absence was strongly negatively correlated (r=-.681) for the total group. For Michigan Educational Program versus absences, 66.7% of the correlations fell within the "very little use" range.

Claus, et al. (1994) also reported on the Saginaw, Michigan high school district to examine variable that could affect attendance at the Averill Career Opportunity Center. The study examined tenth grade students for the 1990-1991 school year at the two Saginaw public high schools. The task focused on system related problems that could decrease student enrollment at the career center. One finding was that students with a lower average attendance record enrolled in the Averill Career Opportunity Center more often. A recommendation for an effective high school attendance policy was a chief result of this study.

The findings of the latter two studies are statistically significant. It is generally expected that grade point averages and absences strongly negatively related. Information and feedback on the grading and promotional policies may provide knowledge that reinforces these findings. Claus' evaluation report recommended that an effective attendance policy be instituted at the career center to achieve desired school success. That recommendation may reflect a belief that attendance strongly impacts grades and/or school-to-work involvement and performance.

Research on the relationship between attendance and grade achievement in high schools is less than abundant. The available research including that for related age/grade levels indicates that both absences and grade achievement are critical concerns. The prevailing conclusion reached in related studies indicates a conclusive correlation between attendance and grades. Where attendance improves, grades tend to improve. Chronic absence is usually an unfavorable factor of grades and resource management, it places demands on scarce resources that negatively impact the availability of learning materials as well as planning and budgeting processes. A workable resolution of absence related problems will have combined effects on both learning and resource allocation. More research is needed that will aid reform in these vital areas that influence a student's achievement potential.

Many newsworthy reports apprise of problems associated with absence and grade performance; a few of these suggest tentative solutions that would seem to abate such effects as high failure and drop-out rates as well as discipline problems. The available studies on correlations between absence and grades offer foundations on which workable processes may be developed that will provide comprehensive approaches to tackle this major problem of absenteeism and seemingly related lowered grade point average. There is a need for timely research to determine the correlation between attendance and grade point average. It hypothesized that there will not be a significant correlation between attendance and grade point average.

Procedures

Population/Sample

The target population in this study will include 172 high school juniors enrolled in a Chicago public school during school years 1995/1996 and 1994/1995. Thirty-two students will be randomly selected from the target population. The sample was selected from the population of junior class members of the 1996/1997 school year. The population data were collected from school records by a school administrator with computer assistance. The single group pre-posttest design will be employed. The instrument used will be school records of attendance and grade point averages for target years of this study. The findings will be tabulated in terms of means and standard deviations. Pearson product moment correlation coefficients will be employed at the .05 level of confidence.

Findings of the Study

Table I indicates a statistically strong positive correlation (r=.8240) between days present and grade point average in the first year of the study at the .05 level of confidence. Data collected for the second year (Table II) show a moderate positive correlation (r=.4860) at the .05 level of confidence. A statistically meaningful relationship holds at the .01 level of confidence for both years. A further examination of days present and grade point average in the first year shows a strong statistically significant relationship at the .001 level of confidence. This study shows that attendance may make a sizable degree of impact on grade point average as determined by means of the respective correlation coefficient. The findings of this study parallel most of those in the review of literature. This primary study is comprised of data that yield findings similar to Akerman and Byock (1987) and Yunker (1967), allowing for such variables as sample size.

The data leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis and the support of the research hypothesis. There is a correlation of attendance and grade point average for this sample.

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ATTENDANCE AND GRADE POINT AVERAGES OF THE SAMPLE

Table I
1994/1995

	Mean	S.D.	Correlation (r)
Days Present	161.7	9.5	
GPA	2.4	.67	.8240

n=32 Significant at the .05 level of confidence

Table II
1995/1996

	Mean	S.D.	Correlation (r)
Days Present	157.8	17.6	
GPA	2.2	.69	.4860

n=32 Significant at the .05 level of confidence

According to the table of r's
at .05 confidence level, r = .3494
at .01 confidence level, r = .4487
at .001 confidence level, r = .5541

Summary

The purpose of this study was to assess whether a relationship exists between attendance and grade point average of public high school students. For the second year of the study a moderate positive correlation that is statistically significant was found between attendance and grade point average. Attendance and grade point average indicated a strong positive statistical correlation for the first year of the study based on the sample statistics. The study was executed by using a random sample of a group juniors enrolled in a Chicago Public High School during the 1996/1997 school year.

The study does show a relationship between attendance and grade point averages that warrants the consideration of professional attention and study. The correlation between attendance and grade point averages suggests meaningful measures of school effectiveness leading to desirable change processes.

Conclusions

The results of research findings in this study indicate a moderate correlation for attendance and grade point average for the second year of study and a strong positive significant correlation for the data of the first year. Both findings are in relative concurrence with review of literature. Studies in the review of literature indicate mostly strong positive correlations for student attendance and corresponding grade point averages in public high school.

The review of literature points out the importance of attendance for optimal grade achievement. Some experts found factors such as self-concept, counselor talk, and gender of student to also influence grade point average. Related measurements of relative impact are not usually expediently assessed but can have attenuating effects on grade.

The research findings in this study seem to parallel the findings of a study by Ackerman and Byock (1989) where a strong significant positive correlation was found to exist between attendance and grade point average. The study was executed to evaluate the performance of underprepared and low-income students in a Summer program aimed to improve academic performance. A strong implication of this study is that high attendance in the Summer program classes seemed to relate to higher grade point averages,

Attendance and grades and related effects cause widespread concerns regarding our country's schools. Attendance is a major consideration for funding education costs. Attendance also seems to be important to a student's success in the classroom.

Implications

Attendance is not only a salient factor in school funding considerations but is also important to successful class work performance for public high school students.

Widespread absenteeism in our nation's public high schools will continue in the short-term and until it is made less attractive to our students.

Recommendations

1. Counselor/mentor talks focused on strategies to improve attendance and grades should be consistently and periodically scheduled in public high schools for target

students with high absence rates and low grades.

2. Daily attendance reports in public high schools affected by high absence rates should be directed to counselors/mentors for scheduling of counselor/mentor talks.

3. Where feasible, tutoring programs should include sessions for subject-matter course work where an administrative designated school professional has observed high absences and low grades.

4. Related tutoring should be flexible and ordered to encourage and reinforce improvement in attendance and grades.

5. An effective system for accumulating and analyzing data relating to attendance and grades and specific to the counselor/mentor talks and tutoring programs should be properly initiated and maintained.

6. Appropriate feedback should be provided to target students and their parents/guardians by their classroom teachers and by counselors and mentors.

7. Recommendations for further research:
   a. larger sample/population
   b. multiple regression study with predictor variables of self-concept, gender of student, absenteeism, and family structure on grade point average
   c. longitudinal study of three to four years.

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